

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 23

31 March 1986

INTERNATIONAL

Reagan Ready To Risk Ties With Soviets

U.S. Reported to Have Sold Stinger Missiles to Rebels In Afghanistan, Angola

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan is ready to risk short-term relations with the Soviet Union in order to defend two major parts of his foreign policy: space-weapons research and support for anticommunist guerrillas.

The president's commitment to these two policy lines was underlined by reports that the Reagan administration has been supplying several hundred sophisticated air-defense weapons—shoulder-held Stinger missiles—to anticommunist insurgents in Angola and Afghanistan, and by Mr. Reagan's almost immediate dismissal of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's latest call for a nuclear-testing ban.

"The president is committed to both these diplomatic tracks," a senior administration official says, noting that they were the only foreign-policy matters mentioned in his second inaugural address.

The official says President Reagan is consciously avoiding what he considers mistakes of previous administrations, which the president asserts made concessions and pre-cooked agreements with the Soviets in order to please them ahead of summit meetings.

Strict Verification

The official also says Mr. Reagan isn't willing to join a nuclear-testing moratorium without strict measures of verification agreed to by both parties. And he is reluctant to stop testing related to the Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars, program.

Mr. Reagan also believes his policies of increased support for guerrillas have played an important role in "turning back Soviet advances in the Third World and making them think twice before taking actions in the Third World."

U.S. officials hope increased support for Afghan guerrillas also might force swifter

Soviet compromises at the United Nations-sponsored negotiations aimed at bringing about a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Senior officials say they believe that a steady White House course on these issues might increase tensions during the short run with Moscow, thus delaying the second Reagan-Gorbachev meeting that Washington had hoped for this summer. They say, however, that they believe Mr. Gorbachev would attend a second superpower summit before the end of the year and that long-term relations would become more stable.

However, Moscow hasn't given any indication that it would delay a second summit.

The administration has said that when President Reagan took office, the two most destabilizing foreign-policy problems were the strategic nuclear buildup and Moscow's engagements—direct and indirect—in the Third World. The White House argues that the SDI program and the support for anticommunist guerrillas, together known as the Reagan Doctrine, address these problems and thus will lead to longer-term stability in the two countries' relations.

Weekend reports, confirmed by sources with access to the information, told of a change of policy reached about a month ago by the president's national security advisers to deliver insurgents Stinger missiles.

White House sources declined to comment on the reports. The guerrillas had previously been sent mainly Soviet and Chinese-made weapons bought on the international arms market or from U.S. allies so the U.S. could deny its support for the insurgents.

Gorbachev Proposal

Another weekend development was Mr. Reagan's rejection of Mr. Gorbachev's proposal for a summit meeting in Europe on the nuclear-testing issue separate from a U.S.-Soviet summit. Mr. Gorbachev argued in a televised speech that the next summit needs to focus on more general questions.

He also warned that the Soviet Union would end its seven-month unilateral moratorium on nuclear-weapons testing if the U.S. carries out another test, which it plans for April.

The decision to provide guerrillas with the Stingers overcame opposition by some State Department officials and sectors of the intelligence community. They, along with Pakistani diplomats, privately say they fear additional support for Afghan rebels might cause the Soviets to carry

fighting over the Pakistani border more often or increase Moscow's efforts to support Pakistani internal turmoil.

The senior administration official says—without confirming the delivery of the missiles—that the administration policy is to respond to the increase of "the quality and quantity of Soviet military supplies in both cases."

He specifically cites the recent Soviet introduction into Afghanistan of 240-millimeter mortars that can rout guerrillas in small valleys, and low-flying aircraft that have significantly increased Soviet front-line reconnaissance capabilities.

"There is certainly a great desire of the administration in both cases to make our support more effective," the official says.

Some American diplomats have argued that there is an unspoken connection between the level of U.S. weapons for anti-communist guerrillas and the Soviet backing for communist insurgents. Hence, they fear that escalation in Angola or Afghanistan could be followed by mirror measures by the Soviets in such places as El Salvador.

A senior official, however, says President Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan favors the increased support, or else the U.S. wouldn't be able to provide it.